



**STRATEGY
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**MAJOR THEATER WARFARE:
STILL RELEVANT THROUGH 2010**

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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This report defines and then analyzes the merit of the nation's present policy concerning the conduct of Major Theater War. Using the nation's interests and the elements of power available to achieve those interests as background, it establishes that our present policy requiring the capability to execute two, nearly simultaneous, Major Theater Wars remains relevant for the near future. This conclusion is reached after first discussing the basis of the policy, and then refuting many of the arguments that criticize our policy concerning Major Theater War.

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MAJOR THEATER WARFARE: STILL RELEVANT THROUGH 2010

NATIONAL INTERESTS AND THE ELEMENTS OF POWER

In his preface to the 1997 version of *A National Security Strategy For A New Century* (NSS) President Clinton immediately defines his first priority: "Protecting the security of our nation--our people, our territory and our way of life--is my foremost mission and constitutional duty."¹ As a nation, policies concerning Major Theater War (MTW) have, since 1950, been a critical element of the security interests of the United States. With the end of the Cold War however, many have come to question the necessity of maintaining our MTW capabilities. In this paper, I will define our present policy concerning MTW and examine its relevance to achieving vital U.S. interests. I will also analyze many of the current arguments against our present MTW policy and conclude that they are basically unfounded. Major Theater Warfare remains a possibility through 2010 and our policy of conducting two MTWs is relevant to achieving our vital interests.

To assist in carrying out the duty mentioned above, the President has not hesitated to utilize economics, diplomacy and the military element of national power available to him. In the past several decades each of our presidents has used these elements, either in concert or individually, to help protect America's national interests.

In *The New Strategic Trinity*, Ralph Peters postulates that "At the end of the 20th century, the more successful the state, the less important its military." In this article he argues that the strategic model of Clausewitz, based on interplay between the state, its people and the military, has been replaced by a new trinity of the state, its people and information. In "successful" states, the military is now only a tool of occasional or last resort. It is not a domestic actor.² While one cannot disregard the role of information in the critical business of strategic interplay within and between states, the supposition that the military is unimportant lacks factual basis.

Former Secretary of State George Marshall believed that "military force without diplomacy is pointless and diplomacy not backed by military force is mere posturing."³ Marshall was clearly an advocate of using the elements of national power in a balanced and complementary effort to protect the interests of the United States. To carry this thought further, we should expect that when a nation uses its economic, diplomatic and military elements of power in a complementary effort to achieve its goals, it generally would be more successful. This was true in Marshall's time and is absolutely true today. Even with the dawning of the information age, all of the elements of national power remain important.

While all of the elements of national power can be effective, and can certainly be used to complement one another,

we have seen military power emerge as our "trump card" option should the economic and diplomatic elements prove ineffective. This increasing reliance on the military is in part due to the United States military's flexibility to respond conventionally, or unconventionally in humanitarian assistance, nation building or peace keeping/enforcing roles. The Libyan raid, Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf, with its on-going crises, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and the recent responses to terrorism in Africa clearly demonstrate the military's usefulness to the nation. The increasing reliance on the military is not due entirely to its utility; it may also be due to our inability to apply the other elements of power effectively as an international player. That, however, will not be discussed in this paper. Rather, it is important to note that the military "trump card" is normally the final element of national power available, and as a result if it fails, our national interests risk compromise. This statement is even more applicable when the United States must act unilaterally or quickly on the international scene. Our military capabilities give the United States a unique status among nations; it makes us the world's only superpower. In direct contrast to Peters' theory, our nation calls on the military frequently, while remaining a very successful state.

What are the "national interests" that we attempt to enhance with the elements of national power? The United States has four basic, relatively unchanging national interests that can be

defined as follows. First, defense of the homeland to protect the people, territory and institutions of the United States. Second, promoting our economic well being, or the national economic interest. Third, international security to maintain a favorable world order, and finally promoting a set of values that we believe to be good and worthy of emulation by other countries. The problem of correctly defining national interests is generally not with identifying these broad enduring interests, but lies instead with assessing the intensity of each of these interests. The intensities of these interests are not constant because they are subject to change depending on the government's perception of their relative urgency at any given time.⁴ Indeed, these intensities may remain unclear until events force greater clarity and a subsequent decision by our national government to act.

The 1998 version of the NSS, defines national interests (or the intensities of the interests) in terms of humanitarian, important or vital. This breakdown allows us to determine their relative importance, and is directly applicable to the associated security risk to the nation. Humanitarian and other interests reflect our nation's values, and include support for human rights, supporting democratization and responding to disasters.⁵ These interests are normally peripheral interests, and involve little risk to the security of the nation. The military element of power is rarely used, in a conventional sense, to advance the nation's purely humanitarian interests.

Important national interests affect our national well being and the character of the world we live in. To preserve these interests, we use our resources "insofar as the costs and risks are commensurate with the interests at stake."⁶ We take a long-term view with these interests, as threats to these interests normally involve trends, which if left unchecked, could eventually harm the nation. An automatic (conventional) military response would not normally be associated with protecting these interests. Selective and limited use of force could however be an option should the other elements of national power prove inadequate.⁷

When interests are vital, they are "of broad, overriding importance to the survival, security and vitality of the nation." These vital interests consist of more than just protecting our territory and citizens. We will do what we must to defend these interests, to include using our military unilaterally and decisively.⁸ Among our stated vital interests, "detering and, if necessary, defeating aggression against U.S. allies and friends"⁹ provides the major basis for our national security policy concerning Major Theater Warfare. The remainder of this discussion will focus on the validity of our policy concerning MTW as it pertains to our nation's ability to "deter and defeat aggression."

MAJOR THEATER WAR POLICY

The 1997 NSS described Major Theater Warfare as "the ultimate test of our Total Force--our active and reserve components--and one in which it must always succeed." It clearly defined the requirement to "...in concert with regional allies, deter credibly and defeat large-scale, cross-border aggression in two distant theaters in overlapping timeframes."¹⁰

The *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR) provides a "fundamental and comprehensive examination of America's defense needs from 1997 to 2015." It is indeed the "blueprint" that the Department of Defense (DOD) will follow to develop our military program in this period.¹¹ Though generally in concert with the 1997 NSS in defining the military's requirements for MTW, the QDR differed from the President's 1997 guidance on the use of allies to deter or defeat aggression. The QDR maintains that we must deter and defeat aggression, preferably in concert with regional allies, while the 1997 version of the NSS postulated that we will deter and defeat aggression *in concert with regional allies*.¹² This difference called into question our real policy and impacted directly on the military force level and composition required to successfully execute our MTW policy.

If it is truly within our vital interests to deter and defeat aggression against our allies, our policy for conducting MTW cannot reasonably depend on the support of others. Allies may come and go, and may or may not honor their obligations. No

nation could responsibly expect to tie the security of its vital interests to the goodwill of allies. Also, because it would be reasonable to assume that the QDR was produced with White House approval, we could have assumed that our policy on Major Theater Warfare required a unilateral execution capability. Thankfully, because of the recently published 1998 version of the NSS, we no longer must make this assumption. Now both the QDR and NSS agree that we must deter and defeat aggression, preferably in concert with allies.¹³

POLICY BASIS

Our present policy requires the U.S. military to win two MTWs, in distant theaters, in overlapping timeframes. This requirement is tied directly to our national interest of deterring and defeating aggression against our friends and allies. We have interests and friends throughout the world, requiring a capability to credibly influence regional events, possibly in widely dispersed areas, around the globe. A two-MTW capability will make a potential aggressor think twice before initiating hostilities, even when we are heavily committed elsewhere. Without this capability, some allies may perceive that if we were engaged in one theater, they could expect little help in maintaining their security when faced with a potential aggressor. If that were the case, our standing as the security partner of choice, and as the leader of the international community would be questioned.¹⁴

The argument to maintain a two (vice one) MTW policy and capability in the United States is central to our policy of engagement and our status as the world's only superpower. Without these elements, a policy of fighting only one MTW would suffice to meet, what would be our less ambitious, vital interests. As the world's engaging superpower however, we have accepted responsibilities that other nations have not, and our leadership is both essential and expected. In many cases only the United States is capable of providing the necessary leadership for international responses to shared challenges. Indeed, we have seen that without American leadership, the international community is often reluctant to act.¹⁵ Our status as a superpower is not just an inflated opinion of ourselves; it is a status recognized by the world, and it comes with great responsibilities.

As stated earlier, a two-MTW policy provides assurance to our many, and widely separated allies that we will honor our security alliances, even if we are engaged in another part of the world. To aggressors, it demonstrates the resolve and capability to honor these security agreements. Confidence in United States' resolve and capability to act promotes stability throughout the world. Without our policy of maintaining the capability of fighting two Major Theater Wars, our credibility would suffer, causing regional instability and a loss of our leadership

stature. Clearly, instability and the erosion of our leadership position are not within the best interests of the United States.

DETERRENCE AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Many have questioned the validity of the "two-MTW" component of the national security policy. The issue of cost, is perhaps one of the greatest concerns to critics. Is there not a better (cheaper) means to deter, and if required, to defeat aggression? Surely we can develop a security policy which will protect our national interests but cost less than the estimated three trillion dollars necessary to maintain a two-MTW capability over the next 60 years.¹⁶ Why not nuclear weapons? The United States has spent billions of dollars to develop and deploy these weapons, so we should strive to get some utility from them. Eisenhower seemed to use nuclear weapons as a credible deterrent in the 1950's; let's do the same today. A declared policy by the United States to respond to any future North Korean (or other aggressor's) invasion with prompt nuclear retaliation sufficient to destroy the aggressor country and its regime would save lives and money, and probably deter aggression.¹⁷ Or would it?

Throughout the Cold War, nuclear weapons were indeed used as a strategic deterrent. Our policies of massive retaliation and later flexible response, made both sides in the bi-polar world less likely to seek direct confrontation. Though I would not argue that nuclear weapons alone prevented a direct Soviet--American confrontation during the Cold War, their presence no

doubt helped to curb the aggressiveness of both states. They were effective deterrents as the superpowers faced each other; two "equal" states. Nuclear weapons did not however prevent the invasions of South Korea in 1950, and Kuwait in 1990. Nor did they prompt a withdrawal by the aggressors when they were faced with opposing the "overwhelming" power of the United States. Nuclear weapons did not deter confrontations that matched a superpower against a "weaker" nation. Just as the Korean Conflict and the Gulf War were resolved in theater wars with conventional (non-nuclear) forces, future acts of aggression will most likely be resolved using conventional forces. This likelihood is due to the nature of the concept of deterrence.

Effective deterrence will normally consist of three requirements; capability, credibility and communication. The requirement of capability reflects the acquisition and actual deployment of military forces to carry out threats of military action. Credibility, on the other hand, reflects the declared intent, matched with believable resolve to protect a given interest. Communication combines the former components, to relay "to potential aggressors, in an unmistakable manner, both the capability and the will to use the deterrent threat."¹⁸ If the force or forces a nation selects to deter potential aggressors lacks either of these requirements, deterrence will not be achieved.

Nuclear weapons are certainly capable, as they exist and can be delivered to any point on earth. However, they fail as deterrents because of their shortcomings in the requirements of credibility and communication. They lack credibility because since 1945, we have consistently shown that we will not use them to protect all of our vital interests. We did not use nuclear weapons in Korea, despite the very real possibility of defeat in the first months of the war. With the emergence of the "flexible response" strategy in the 1960s, we communicated effectively to the world that we were unwilling to use our nuclear capability unless our sovereignty was directly threatened or the Soviet Union moved directly against selected allies. Nuclear weapons became threats with which to guarantee our national survival and selectively contain direct Soviet aggression. No longer were they weapons to be used to protect all of our vital interests. We lacked the resolve to use them and communicated this message consistently. To potential aggressors, this message holds true even today.

CONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE

Without a credible nuclear deterrent, we have again turned to our conventional forces as our principal deterrent to armed aggression. Conventional forces meet all of the requirements to serve as an effective deterrent. They are capable because they exist, and because of our military presence visible throughout the world. Though we no longer station as large a number of

forces overseas, because of a reduced emphasis on forward deployment, we still maintain a significant presence in many areas of the world. With a continued forward presence in Asia, Europe and Southwest Asia, we daily demonstrate our force capabilities. Combat forces on the ground represent the nation's strongest commitment to our allies.¹⁹ Aggressors have taken note of such commitment, and since 1941, no aggressor has directly challenged any of our forward deployed forces.

Our reduced forward presence is augmented by our demonstrated ability to rapidly deploy forces to any trouble spot. Our change in strategy to make the United States a power projection platform adds significantly to the capability requirement for deterrence. The successful deployment of forces to Saudi Arabia in 1990 did not go unnoticed by potential aggressors. They also no doubt noticed that it took five months to deploy these forces, and may have drawn the conclusion that our conventional forces would be ineffective if their aggressions were quickly executed. We have not ignored this potential shortcoming in our ability to deploy, and its impact on conducting Major Theater Warfare.

Our surge sealift capabilities have improved dramatically since 1991. By the year 2000, the United States will rely on four sets of government controlled sealift assets to deploy equipment in case of a crisis. To augment pre-positioned stocks on the ground, we have the Army's Afloat Prepositioning Force

(APS) of one balanced heavy brigade and the Marine's three Maritime Prepositioning Squadrons (MPS). This floating equipment gives our military the flexibility to respond quickly, with credible forces, to any coastal region. The Eight Fast Sealift Ships of the Military Sealift Command provide a 96-hour response capability as do our 19 recently programmed Large Medium Speed Roll On/Off (LMSR) ships. Finally, the 96 ships of the Ready Reserve Force are available to the nation with four, five, 10 and 20-day response times.²⁰ As a nation, we have put more than words behind building our power projection capability.

Through routine exercises, we demonstrate both our capability and communicate our willingness to introduce credible force anywhere on the globe. Our capabilities to rapidly deploy forces and our recently demonstrated resolve to use conventional forces make them the greatest deterrent to armed aggression available to our nation.

MTW POSSIBILITIES

An argument against maintaining the forces to support a two-MTW policy is that there is no real threat of an aggressor risking a MTW against the world's only remaining superpower. If there is no real danger of a single aggressor risking a military confrontation, then surely the odds must be significantly higher against two aggressors acting simultaneously. With such high

odds, the justification to spend the extra 50 billion dollars a year to maintain a two (vice one) MTW capability does not exist.²¹

This argument is clearly without merit; threats do exist. Even today, we live with the possibility of war with North Korea and Iraq.²² Both nations pose serious threats to regional security. Both have made irrational and aggressive moves in the past, and there is no reason to expect them to renounce the use of military power to achieve their goals. Additionally, Iran, Syria, China and a radical Egypt are authoritarian, possess the capability to wage large-scale conventional wars, and are hostile to the United States.²³ These threats may remain or disappear, but others will no doubt develop to replace them. The future is uncertain and maintaining our two-MTW capability strengthens our leadership position in the world and enhances both regional and global stability.

Given the possibility of two MTWs, some advocate a policy of sequentially dealing with one, and then the other MTW.²⁴ Such policy would be clearly flawed, when we consider the effect it would have on our friends around the world. Allies would effectively tie their security to the chance that we would determine that theirs was the "critical" or first MTW. Few leaders would so risk their nation's security and would seek to guarantee their security with other partners. Such actions would

impact on both regional stability and the leadership of the United States.

"WE ARE JUST TOO GOOD" AND ASYMMETRICAL WARFARE

Despite the very real threats of North Korea and Iraq, some maintain that because the United States is so proficient at Major Theater War, no aggressor would dare face us in such conflict. I call this the "we are just too good" theory. Considering our fairly recent successes in the Persian Gulf and Panama, many rational people no doubt support this theory. Because "we are just too good," aggressor nations or groups will prefer other, or "asymmetrical" means of warfare to cripple the United States and derail our strategies to achieve our national interests. The primary means of this asymmetrical warfare include using weapons of mass destruction (WMD), attacks on our information systems and terrorism. Such attacks may indeed impact on our policies to achieve our national goals, and some may advocate that these threats, vice Theater War, must be our primary concern. Because the "we're just too good" and "asymmetrical threat" arguments naturally flow into one another, I will address each in turn.

What makes us so good that potential aggressors will avoid direct conflict with the United States? Proponents of this theory contend that it is due to the very nature of our forces. Certainly our military forces are both capable and credible. They are well equipped and trained, and we have not refrained from employing them to protect our national interests. Following

our victory in Desert Storm, it appears that given our forces, training and technology, and our ability to bring it all together on the battlefield, we would simply overwhelm any potential opponent. As a result, no aggressor would dare attempt to challenge us in Theater Warfare. Such a reputation for superiority has not historically prevented challenges by dedicated nations.

In 1973, Arab forces achieved stunning initial successes against the Israeli forces opposing them. These forces, trained and focused, looked to avenge their earlier humiliation of 1967.²⁵ Arabs went into battle with more than a sense of vengeance; they also went with tactical and technical improvements designed to counter known Israeli strengths. Arab infantry, firing concentrated volleys of anti tank weapons, were employed effectively against Israeli armor. They deployed a formidable anti aircraft umbrella and neutralized the vaunted Israeli Air Force's effectiveness in both the close and deep battles.²⁶ The fact that this war ended in another Israeli victory, does not negate its historical significance. In only six years, the same Arab forces that had been previously humiliated, tried again to defeat their foe that had been "just too good" earlier. They adapted their training and equipment to counter Israeli strengths and came dangerously close to succeeding. In Arab eyes, despite the support of the United

States, Israel wasn't "just too good" and they were ready to attempt another test in conventional war.

Some might choose to discount this example because of the Arab ability to field more men and equipment than the Israelis. Due to their numerical superiority and the potential to eventually overwhelm Israel, the Arabs could have been seen as having a very good chance of success. Maybe Israel really wasn't "just too good." This position should sound very familiar to students of the Korean War. Surely, planners of the day thought, the advancing North Korean Army would stop when confronted by even a small contingent of the United States Army.²⁷ North Korea could not possibly hope to prevail against a nation that had so recently led the way in destroying the Axis powers in a world war fought on two fronts. As the members of Task Force Smith would soon discover, the North Koreans were not so impressed with the past victories, or the military potential of their American adversary. Today, as in 1950, the key to military success lay not with reputations gained from past victories or military potential, but with what could be brought immediately to bear in the critical theater of operations. The prospect of MTW remains a viable threat to our national interests. Our two-MTW policy, made possible through our current force structure and ability to project these forces to any critical region, is the key to our ability to deter regional aggression.

One of the current terms used frequently in military circles is "asymmetrical threat." This term encompasses the "other" or non-traditional threats we may face in the world today, ranging from terrorism to informational war. Perhaps we should focus on countering asymmetrical threats and not the threat of theater war. We will almost certainly face asymmetrical threats, while the threat of theater war is much more remote.

I agree that the likelihood of asymmetrical threats is much greater than the threat of theater war. Indeed, we face the threat of terrorism, both nationally and internationally every day. The same can be said of informational war, where even in the Gulf War individuals targeted our information systems to gain access to sensitive data concerning U.S. force strengths and dispositions.²⁸ Additionally, potential rivals are already developing informational warfare tools designed to cripple not just our information systems, but also its users.²⁹ The critical issue though, is not the likelihood of the threat, but the threat's ability to impact on the realization of our vital national interests.

Terrorism has and always will be a "poor man's" way of waging war. It makes the news, makes a statement, draws a normally short-term response and is generally then downplayed until another incident occurs. Then the cycle is repeated until the groups responsible are either destroyed or disbanded. Occasionally reprisals against nations that sponsor terrorism

have even been conducted, as we saw with Libya during the Reagan administration. Through the years and each of these terrorist cycles however, history does not provide examples of nations that have fallen, or whose vital interests were seriously threatened due to only terrorist attacks on its people or infrastructure.

The effectiveness of informational warfare has yet to be tested, but it is doubtful that alone it would be much more effective than terrorism in impacting seriously a nation's goals. This is due to the fact that information systems are merely technological improvements; tools that allow us to operate more quickly and more cheaply. As has been true with most technological advances, we should expect that those who lag in the informational arena will quickly close the gap with those in the lead. Also in warfare, we have seen that technological advantages are generally short-lived. "If necessity is the mother of invention, asymmetric tactics, strategy, or technological countermeasures will always upset the best laid technology based plans."³⁰ Human beings will adapt.

Certainly, in the short-term, information attacks on areas such as financial records and communications facilities would seriously degrade our national capabilities. After the initial shock however, we would adapt, using our backup disks, paper or even couriers, if necessary to continue the business of running the country. In this age of computer viruses and the Y2K issue, very few individuals and organizations do not back up information

systems with other electronic, manual or paper mechanisms to ensure that they could carry on if their informational systems were seriously degraded.

The point of the above discussions is that terrorist and information system threats, while likely, do not alone pose a serious threat to the nation and the realization of our vital national interests. Rather they could be used effectively to complement an aggressor's actions if engaged in a theater war with the United States. For this reason, we must remain concerned with and capable of countering asymmetrical threats, while continuing to maintain our policy and capability of fighting two MTWs.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION (WMD)

What about WMD, which consists of the nuclear, biological and chemical threats? Certainly these threats, which could be employed with catastrophic results against the United States and its allies, remain a principal concern to our government. WMD would most likely be categorized as the "most dangerous" threat to the nation in that it could produce potentially devastating effects. Why then have adversaries not historically resorted to using them against us, despite their availability? The answer to this question is found in the limited nature of warfare since 1945.

If the recent past serves as an indicator, nations will continue to fight "limited" wars and not wars of national

survival. In the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union participated in or supported theater warfare without escalating to direct confrontation and the use of nuclear weapons. Both parties deemed the price of escalation (mutual destruction) as too high. Though potential adversaries cannot be guaranteed to demonstrate the restraint of the two former superpowers, they could not rationally expect to survive escalation against the United States. Recall our threat to Iraq concerning Iraq's potential use of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons in the Gulf War. If these weapons were used, our "explicit" objective would be to replace Iraq's current leadership.³¹ The United States was, and still is certainly capable of attaining such an objective against aggressors. Aggressors who introduce WMD in conflict against the United States, will most likely be fighting for their national survival.

For most aggressors, the risk of annihilation, by WMD or conventional means, is not worth the potential benefit of victory. This may explain why aggressors have resorted to "limited" warfare in the past 50 years. Major Theater Warfare with the United States has not yet resulted in the destruction of an aggressor nation. Thus our policy to "defeat" aggression has historically meant "contain" the aggression of potential adversaries. Our policy objectives have been met by a general return to the "status quo," as was demonstrated most recently in the Persian Gulf, where we conducted only limited "military

actions designed to bring about Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait."³² The Bush administration quickly stopped military actions because the Iraqi military had been ousted from Kuwait, and due to the desire to build long term trust with our Arab allies who remained somewhat suspicious of our long term intentions in the region. The principle that aggression cannot pay had been reaffirmed though Saddam remained in power.³³

Conversely, aggressors who escalate to nuclear weapons will achieve only victory or their total destruction. This same argument could be made concerning any weapon of mass destruction employed against the United States. Conventional aggression may result in the same victory, but without the associated risk of total destruction. Clearly, we can expect that aggressors resolved to use the military element of power, will continue to prefer conventional means to achieve their aims. Even if they are unsuccessful in their aggressions, they may still remain in power.

FLEXIBILITY IN A VOLATILE WORLD

Our two-MTW policy is not based on threats as was our previous policy of containment of the Soviet Union. It is based rather on maintaining a capability, for what could happen. Those who advocate a return to threat based strategy would like to identify a threat and then seek to contain it. Such a policy, though adopted by the United States for almost 50 years, is not really feasible, especially in today's highly volatile world.

Recall that our strategy must protect our vital interests, and that some of the intensities of our interests are transitory in nature. What is not important today may become critical with a change in administration or international circumstance.

In 1950, then Secretary of State Dean Acheson excluded South Korea from our "defense perimeter." When North Korea invaded, Truman viewed Korea in a different light. Conversely, in 1954, Eisenhower decided not to become involved in Indochina. He did this after establishing the clear decision-making criteria based on indigenous, allied and congressional support, as well as assurance of swift and decisive military action. With a change in administration, Kennedy adopted a more open decision making process, and decided to escalate our involvement.³⁴

Such changes in defining and quantifying our vital interests will continue to occur and we must maintain a flexible capability to respond when interests change or become more intense. Our policy of remaining capable of fighting and winning two Major Theater Wars gives the United States the flexibility to cope with sudden changes in the international environment and with our sometimes rapidly changing national interests. Fehrenbach's last statement in *This Kind of War* that "The lesson of Korea is that it happened", remains applicable today.³⁵

What keeps aggressors from risking a confrontation with the United States? As discussed earlier, it is our conventional deterrence that remains credible, capable and clearly

communicated. Our nuclear capability will not keep North Korea, Iran or Iraq in check because we will not use it in a regional conflict. Our reputation as the masters of conventional war will not intimidate a determined aggressor. Without our capability to win Major Theater Wars, grounded in the availability of conventional forces, we are left with only the diplomatic and economic elements of power to deal with aggressors. Sadly, their effectiveness to deter or defeat aggression is clearly lacking, as was demonstrated most recently in the Persian Gulf, Haiti and Bosnia. Diplomacy and economics are poor "trump cards" with which to guarantee our vital interests.

DEFENDING NATIONAL INTERESTS

What if deterrence fails and we are required to actually defeat aggression? We must either prepare to fight or be morally prepared to surrender. Without capable conventional forces, we are faced with a choice between holocaust and humiliation.³⁶ If we choose to fight, theater war with conventional forces is our option of choice. No aggressor has succeeded against an America committed to waging theater warfare. Our commitment to waging war is a key concern though. If we had to build up sufficient forces to wage conventional war, accepting tactical and strategic losses during the building process, our resolve could waver. As time passes, and without a direct threat to our survival, American resolve will fade. Should this happen, we place our vital interests at risk. Quick resolution favors the United

States, and requires forces that are immediately available. Maintaining a two-MTW policy provides the ability to resolve conflicts quickly and thereby minimize risks to our national objectives. The lessons of Vietnam and the Gulf are not lost on our potential adversaries; they should not have to be re-learned by us.

We have emerged from the Cold War as the world's only superpower and through 2015 there is little danger of a peer competitor emerging to challenge us.³⁷ Despite this, the world remains a complex and dangerous place filled with potential threats to our vital interests. Because of our global interests and capabilities, our leadership in world affairs is both expected and required. This is due in part to the credibility of the United States, grounded in our historical reputation for reliability. Simply put, we have traditionally honored our obligations and have not sought to exploit "weaker" countries. None of the economic or military powers of the day enjoy such a reputation.

Our military capabilities are a critical component of our national power. These military capabilities and our reputation combine to make the United States a superpower that is not feared; we are however, respected. Our national security policy concerning Major Theater Warfare provides the basis for that respect and is essential to American leadership. The policy of deterring, and if necessary winning, two nearly simultaneous

Major Theater Wars communicates our capability and credibility to both our allies and potential adversaries. It is relevant, and the capability and resolve to implement this policy must be maintained.

Word count is 5343 words.

ENDNOTES

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⁹ QDR, 8.

¹⁰ 1997 NSS, 12.

¹¹ QDR, 1.

¹² Ibid., 12.

¹³ 1998 NSS, 22.

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¹⁵ 1997 NSS, 1.

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